

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY

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EXDIS MILITARY ADDEES HANDLE AS SPECAT EXCLUSIVE

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DEPT PASS USCINCEUR AND OTHER POSTS AS DESIRED.

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS:PFOR, PINT,ET,US, SU

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SUBJECT: INITIAL DEBRIEFING KAGNEW 2

BEGIN SUMMARY. KAGNEW 2 OBSERVATIONS DURING FOUR MONTHS DETENTION BY ELF SHED LIGHT ON GROUP'S MOVEMENTS, MOTIVATION AND MODUS OPERANDI. PAIR MADE EVIDENTLY RELATIVELY ANODYNE RECORDED STATEMENT TO ELF LEADER IMMEDIATELY PRIOR THEIR RELEASE. END SUMMARY.

1. FOLLOWING PARAGRAPHS PROVIDE DETAILS GLEANED FROM INFORMAL DEBRIEFINGS KAGNEW 2 HOSTAGES BOWIDOWICZ AND STRICKLAND AT RESIDENCE JANUARY 9-10 PRIOR TO THEIR DEPARTURE FOR EUCOM.

2. CAPTURE: PAIR WAS SEIZED BY "DEMOLITION UNIT" WHOSE INSTRUCTIONS HAD NOT REPEAT NOT INCLUDED BLOWING UP TRACT D SITE. HOWEVER, ELF COMMAND/CONTROL ARRANGEMENTS TIME CONSUMING DUE BOTH (A) ABSENCE EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS (MESSAGES FROM COMMANDARS TO UNITS TAKE SEVERAL WEEKS); AND (B) EGALITARIAN NATURE OF MOVEMENT (ORDINARILY SOLDIERS FREQUENTLY DEBATE, AND DO NOT NECESSAIRLY OBEY ORDERS RECEIVED). PAIR BELIEVE THEY WERE TAKEN AS RESULT AN AD HOC DECISION ON SPOT. MOHAMMED OWD (PHONETIC) WHOM THEY IDENTIFIED AS AN ELF MILITARY LEADER, WAS INITIALLY IGNORANT OF THEIR CAPTURE. KAGNEW 2 ASSUME MICHALKE SEIZURE LAST MONTH WAS SIMILARLY UNAUTHORIZED.

3. PERSONAL WELFARE: ELF FOOD BOTH DREARY AND LACKING NUTRITIONAL VALUE. EVEN ELF MEN TAKE VITAMIN SHOTS WHENEVER THEY CAN. PAIR THEREFORE WERE MOST APPRECIATIVE OF INITIAL PACKAGES FOOD, VITAMINS AND BLANKETS WHICH DID REACH THEM DURING NOVEMBER. AS RESULT, STRICKLAND GAINED BACK SOME OF WEIGHT LOST AND BOTH MEN FELT LESS EXHAUSTED AND RUN-DOWN THAN AT FIRST.

4. GENERAL TREATMENT: KAGNEW 2 AT ALL TIMES WERE UNDER GUARD BY ONE TWELVE-MAN DETACHMENT ARMED WITH SOVIET PK-47 AUTOMATIC WEAPONS. ALL 12 WERE YOUNG. THREE WERE CHRISTIAN. ONE SPOKE EXCELLENT ENGLISH AND ACTED AS INTERPRETER, THOUGH MOST UNDERSTOOD SOME ENGLISH. GUARDS WERE SYMPATHETIC AND OCCASIONALLY WENT OUT OF THEIR WAY TO BE HELPFUL, BUT LIEUTENANT IN CHARGE OFTEN BULLIED

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PAIR OR WAS NEEDLESSLY INCONSIDERATE. GROUP MOVED PRISONERS EVERY THREE TO FOUR WEEKS WITH A 50-MILE RADIUS OF ELF HQ AT LOCATION CALLED RUBDA REPEAT RUBDA. THEY WERE NEVER AT HQ AND HAD ALMOST NO CONTACT WITH ELF LEADERSHIP. PAR SURPRISED FIND ON BEING RELEASED, THAT THEY HAD BEEN ONLY 10 MINUTES DRIVE FROM SUDANESE FRONTIER.

5. ELF ORGANIZATION AND MORALE: THREE-QUARTERS ELF PERSONNEL

SAID TO BE UNDER 25 WITH SOME IN EARLY TEENS. RECRUITS RECEIVE POLITICAL INDOCTRINATION ALONG WITH THEIR MILITARY TRAINING. KAGNEW 2 WERE CONTINUALLY CALLED UPON DEFEND USG RECORD ON VIETNAM AND ETHIOPIA BY INDIVIDUALS WHO HAD OBVIOUSLY BEEN DRILLED ON ANTI-US LINE. ELF MORALE WAS DESCRIBED AS HIGH WITH FORCES PREPARED FOR LONG STRUGGLE. ALL UNITS SEEN HAD AUTOMATIC RIFLES AND SOME POSSESSED ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUNS (PAIR SAW SOME AMMO). ELF ISSUES MONTHLY PROPAGANDA HANDOUT FOR ALL RANKS IN TIGRINYA. MASTHEAD CARRIES SYMBOL OF HAMMER AND SICKLE BUT ELF MEN CAREFULLY NOTED TO KAGNEW 2 THAT THESE ARE SEPARATED, NOT LINKED AS IN USSR.

6. ELF GOALS: ELF IS FIGHTING FOR FULL INDEPENDENCE. AN RCC OF SOME SORT WOULD THEN BE SET UP FOR TRANSITIONAL PERIOD FOLLOWED BY "DEMOCRACY" AFTER FIVE YEARS. THOUGH ELF CONTACTS WERE HIGHLY CRITICAL USG FOREIGN POLICIES, (E.G., VIETNAM, ANGOLA), AME INDIVIDUALS TOLD PAIR THEY REGARD RUSSIANS AS "NO GOOD".

7. RELEASE STATEMENT: PAIR WERE REQUIRED MAKE RECORDED STATEMENT TO ELF LEADER AT TIME THEY WERE INFORMED OF THEIR RELEASE. THEY STATE THAT THEIR REMARKS WERE LIMITED TO GIVING THEIR NAMES AND SIMILAR IDENTIFYING INFO AND THAT THEY SAID NOTHING INJURIOUS TO USG (COMMENT: TENOR THEIR REMARKS IMPLIED THAT THEY MAY HAVE INCLUDED COMMENTS IN STATEMENT DESCRIBING FAVORABLY THE TREATMENT THEY HAD RECEIVED).

8. COMMENT: RESTRICTIONS PLACED ON KAGNEW 2, PLUS THEIR IGNORANCE OF LOCAL LANGUAGE, OBVIOUSLY LIMIT VALUE THEIR OBSERVATIONS. HOWEVER, DURATION THEIR DETENTION AND FACT THAT THEIR GUARDS APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN ON GENERALLY GOOD TERMS WITH THEM SEEMS TO HAVE MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR THEM GAIN SOME APPRECIATION ELF MODUS OPERANDI.

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